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ABSTRACT

This study sought to describe, at the level of practice, one teacher's use of humanism in the classroom. Methods of participant observation were used to capture reflective contrasts between the subject's intended behavior (by formal and informal interviews), actual behavior (by direct observation), and ideal behavior (by readings from humanist authors). The constant-comparative method was used for data analysis. Results confirmed findings of inconsistencies between teachers' reported philosophies and their actual practices. It appeared that humanist teachers are not often distinguishable from other teachers in their methods. (Author/CB)

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HUMANISM IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe at the level of practice one teacher's use of humanism in the classroom. Methods of participant observation were used to capture reflective contrasts between the subject's intended behavior (by formal and informal interviews), actual behavior (by direct observation), and ideal behavior (by readings from humanist authors). The constant-comparative method was used for data analysis. Results confirmed findings from previous efforts that found inconsistencies between teachers' reported philosophies and their actual practices. It appears that humanistic teachers are not often distinguishable from other teachers in their methods.

Numerous texts have been written on the topic of humanistic education (Fairfield, 1971; Weinberg, 1972; Schlosser, 1976), yet these authors concede there is little agreement about what humanism is and less clarity about its applications to instruction. Humanism (when described as either a theory of psychology or as a philosophy of education) has been characterized as a confluence of diverse theoretical orientations, including neopsychoanalytic, phenomonological, gestalt, existential and Rogerian influence. Because of this complexity, the psychology and philosophy of humanism lacks a coherent and integrated rationale (Thoresen, 1976).

GUIDANCE FROM THEORY

As might be expected, the extant literature does not describe specific behaviors which characterize humanistic teaching; rather, the principles of humanistic education are offered. The most explicit statement of these ideals was authored by Kurtz (1977):

> (1) the need for education to be relevant to the needs of students and to the problems of contemporary society; (2) the insistence that teachers should teach living students and not dead subject matter and emphasize creative learning; (3) the commitment to experimentation and innovation in educational curriculum and methods; (4) the view that students be given opportunity to participate and share in wider phases of school life; (5) the effort to overcome the dehumanizing and alienating forces that educational institutions seem to generate; (6) recognition that one of the most important aims of education should be development of critical intelligence and fulfillment of human potential (p. xi).

These broadly interpretable ideals offer few implications

for instructional practice. The lack of a clear theoretical base has also discouraged empirical research. As a result, little is known about what teachers mean when they say they are humanists. Which principles do teachers select from humanistic theory? How does that theory transfer to practice? The purpose of this study was to answer these questions, through a descriptive investigation of one teacher's use of humanism in the classroom.

METHOD

THE SAMPLE

A purposive sample was obtained by selection of a subject who had a reputation as a humanistic teacher. Both she and her colleagues classified her teaching as humanistic because of her self-reported knowledge of the philosophy, and her advocacy of the student as a person. For example, in conflict situations between administrators and students, the subject typically defended the students' position and rights; she spent time in class discussing individual student's attitudes, beliefs and behaviors; she decorated her classroom with posters proclaiming the self-worth of the individual; and she saw evidence of her rapport with students by the number who returned to visit her after class.

The subject (Charle Benson) was a veteran teacher who had taught at Deer Creek High School for 14 years. The majority of her experience had been in the English department, although she was currently a member of the social studies staff. Charle

participated willing in the study because she enjoyed discussing her teaching, and because she had had a favorable association with the researcher in another professional context. To minimize the possibility of her artifical or reactive behavior, Charle was informed only of the general nature of the study (teaching "style"), but not told of the specific focus on humanism.

THE SITE

The school in which the subject taught was characterized by diversity in student body, faculty and administration. Located in a large suburban district, Deer Creek High School was composed of students labeled by their peers as "jocks", "freaks" or "cowboys", representing upper to lower-middle class families. Although 70% of these students would continue through college, many had part-time jobs and lived with non-family members.

The faculty at Deer Creek were as hetereogeneous as their pupils, in both their personal and professional views. The school was described by one informant as "Deer Freak High School, a place where all the old hippies go", due to the number of staff whose lifestyles do or did fit the label. Deer Creek also housed a larger number of faculty whose personal lives seemed more conventional. In addition to these social differences, the teachers were known as factious for their professional disagreements, particularly concerning the involuntary transfer of their most controversial member. During and since that time, the teachers had repeatedly filed formal and informal complaints against each other.

The school's administration seemed to be in a continual state of flux. Principals had come and gone three times within the past five years, causing leadership instability and school disunity. The previous principal had recently resigned due, in part, to his experience with the teacher dismissal process. The current principal had once been a teacher at Deer Creek and enjoyed the friendship of some of his staff, while providing all with considerable autonomy.

DATA COLLECTION

Triangulation in data collection was accomplished by using three methods of field study - - direct observation, formal and informal interviews, and document collection. First, thirty-three hours were spent in participant observation of the subject's psychology classes for seniors. The observations were characterized by antedotal record of detailed descriptions, separated on field-notes from inferences and comments.

Second, twelve hours of audiorecorded, semi-structured interviews with the subject supplemented direct observation. Formal interviews were transcribed to written record. Informal interviews that preceded or followed an observation were recorded on field-note forms.

Third, examples of the subject's materials and lesson plans that illustrated her efforts toward forming a humanistic philosophy and practice were collected. These three methods resulted in approximately 200 pages of data. In addition, numerous hours were spent obtaining information about humanism

through personal interviews with two practicing psychologists and by readings from 11 texts representative of the literature.

Selection of a single-subject sample allowed for intensive investigation of humanistic instruction. The subject's practices were examined in three dimensions: (1) intended (by interviews with the subject prior to or following an observation); (2) actual (by direct observation of instructional practices); and (3) ideal (by readings from humanist authors, upon whose advice the subject reportedly based her actions). This method allowed for reflective contrasts of ideal behavior with intended behavior, intended behavior with actual behavior, and actual behavior with ideal behavior. Although each type of comparison was explored in the study, the emphasis in data collection and analysis developed the dialectic between prescriptive inference in the literature and the subject's instructional practice. For example, the teacher stated that she relied upon the work of Maslow and Rogers to guide her teaching; their published statements were used to illustrate her use or misuse of humanism. Descriptions of the subject's methods were preceded or followed by quotations from humanist authors, offering their opinions about the type of practice observed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was accomplished through the constant-comparative method as described by Glaser (1969). From this analysis, patterns and categories emerged from the extensive data record. These patterns were refined and coded, generating data-based propositions about the phenomenon under question.

FINDINGS

ROLE CONFLICT

The central theme of role conflict emerged from the data analysis. As a psychology teacher, the subject saw her role encompassing more of the responsibilities of a therapist than of an educator. Her philosophy and goals for her students resembled more closely the aims of therapy than the objectives of education. For example, the subject's humanistic philosophy emphasized the importance of developing a healthy personality; of finding something positive in anything negative; and of taking control of one's own life. Her objectives for her students were to cause them to develop more self-confidence; to assist them in realizing their feelings and thoughts; and to help them identify their emotions, motivations, perceptions, and defense mechanisms.

Symonds (1975) distinguished between therapy and education by defining therapy as assistance to achieve new attitudes, courage and self-assurance to make it possible to become educated. Education, on the other hand, assists individuals to form the habits and skills to be able to cope with the environment. The teacher's stated concerns were with the former, although she did not concede to application of the label "therapy".

The teacher's instructional practice also revealed evidence of role conflict. The study originally had a dual focus on her use of humanism and on her use of strategies to teach reading in the content area. This latter focus was abandoned when

the subject revealed she was not able to devote time to teaching study skills; her priority was to motivate students to express their feelings and thoughts in small group sessions. These small group sessions (conducted to facilitate "creative risk", a state in which individuals honestly and openly share their feelings with one another), together with students' autobiographical presentations (required to enhance students' self-confidence), consumed five weeks of an eight-week course.

Although she denied the label "encounter group", the structure and the process of Charle's group sessions exemplified the method. She grouped students in varying numbers (ranging from a one-to-one arrangement to involving the entire class in one large group) to discuss feelings and thoughts on teacher-directed topics. Charle preferred to refer to these sessions by using other descripters:

I: In one particular session you mentioned to your students the groups you're running are not therapy groups or sensitivity sessions. What then are they? How would you label or define them?

S: I'd say they are seminars or forums on getting to know the people in their class better. It's kind of an opportunity to get to know that people have common bonds. Just because you're not a jock or a freak, that doesn't matter. Everyone fears, everyone loves, everyone has had embarrassing things happen to them, everyone has felt inferior, many people have contemplated suicide. It's such a weight off their chest to find out they're not alone.

I: How then would you say these groups differ from therapy or sensitivity sessions?

S: Therapy groups or sensitivity sessions have some motive in getting a certain group of people together and them a goal that

> you want to reach at the end of each session, so you put certain people together for a reason, which I don't do. I'm not after one specific thing with one specific person.

The humanistic literature provides many names for small group experiences, such as a basic encounter group, sensitivity training, a human-relations laboratory or an interpersonal-growth-oriented T-group. Whatever the label, all such experiences share the format of participants interacting with the group leader and with each other to grow in interpersonal effectiveness (Eagan, 1970). Encounter groups or therapy sessions can be conducted simply to increase the participants' awareness of their own emotions, without a more specific goal. Rogers (1970) reiterates this philosophy in discussing his involvement with group experiences:

> I usually gave no specific goal for a particular group and sincerely wanted it to develop its own directions. There were times when, because of some personal bias or anxiety, I have had a specific goal for a group. When this has happened, either the group has carefully defeated that aim or has spent enough time dealing with me so that I have truly regretted having a specific goal in mind...In no basic philosophical way, so far as I can see, does this approach differ from that which I have adopted for years in individual therapy (p.45).

INCONSISTENT PRACTICES: ENCOUNTER GROUPS

Although the subject stated that she did not intend to facilitate encounter groups, she was conducting these sessions in actual practice. By doing so, she was inconsistent with the humanistic literature in three respects. First, the amount of time she devoted to students' emotional development interfered with her ability to foster intellectual growth. Read (1975) characterized humanistic education as "the integration of

cognitive learning with affective learning" (p. 416). Charle's inability to balance these two responsibilities created an inequitable situation.

A second inconsistent practice was Charle's use of coercion to ensure participation in group sessions. Although she verbalized to her students that she wanted to be seen as another human being and not as a authoritarian teacher, she used all the power of her role to accomplish her goals. For example, she informed students that if they revealed events that occurred during group sessions, they would lose credit for the course. she demanded answers to questions she posed to her students about their feelings and would not accept "I don't know" as a response. Many of the events that occurred during the sessions illustrated further her coercive behavior:

> During a group session one student volunteered that he felt more comfortable talking about menstration since he began dating one girl on a regular basis. He said that with each month he became more comfortable. The teacher responded, "I'm so glad." She then turned to another male and asked how he felt about the topic. The student squirmed in his chair, looked around, and admitted stammeringly to feeling rather uncomfortable discussing the topic. Charle looked directly at him and asked, "Are you a virgin?" The student did not respond. Charle continued to stare at him, waiting and expecting a response. The student did answer eventually, blushing as he responded.

Humanist authors have not advocated forced participation in sessions designed to explore emotions. Rogers (1970) has described his willingness to allow individuals to remain "psychologically on the sidelines." Silber (1975) has described the effects of coercing personal revelations:

> I know that some can argue...that privacy is not an absolute and unquestioned value. The argument

> is that it is not healthy for people to be private about their deepest emotions and thoughts...Therefore, privacy is not something that is "invaded"; it is rather something to be overcome. My reply is that there is value in nature and in man as a part of nature and that the cost to the individual and to human dignity when privacy is overcome is exorbitant (p. 199).

The subject's third inconsistent practice with regard to use of encounter groups was the very inclusion of these sessions in her repertoire of methods. The practice of using group interactions to exemplify humanism is debatable within the field. Even when accepted by some as representative of the theory, cautions and criticisms are prevalent within the literature. For example, Silber (1975) warns against the dangers of invading privacy with the "reckless abandon" of the encounter group program. The danger described is the claim that these sessions lead participants to honest and open expression of themselves, when in fact the possibility of deception is as great in the contrived context of an encounter session as it is in a normal setting.

INCONSISTENT PRACTICES: IMPOSING VALUES

In her interpretation of affective teaching, Charle attempted frequently to impose her values on her students. Her usual method was to relate a personal experience that would also teach her students a moral:

> S: I was conducting a small group in Psych one Monday after the prom. In this group was one good-looking senior guy and the girl he took to the prom. When I looked at these two people I saw hate radiating.

> They both talked, but not to each other. After class the girl approached me and said she couldn't stand to be in that group with him. I asked what happened at the prom. She told me they went to the prom and he spent about $200. After the prom the question came up of what to do now. The guy said they were going to Motel 6; she said no and he said, "Yes, we are; we're all going" and drove right there. She had to get out of the car and hitchike home. That made me really mad. I called the guy aside and asked him what was the story here about Motel 6? He said to me, "Well, why not? I paid $200; I expect something back for the money." We went round and round about that and we never agreed on that.

Moralizing and giving advice were vehicles Charle used when delving into the affective area of her instruction. By doing so, she was prescribing behavior for her students. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the subject's intentions, her actions, and her theoretical base.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Examination of Figure 1 reveals that the subject's actions were consistent with her goals, but neither her goals nor her actions were consistent with the humanistic literature. As Schlosser (1976) stated, it is possible for a teacher to be a real person in relationships with students. Teachers can be angry with students, interested in their lives, and be sensitive and sympathetic without imposing their own feelings on their students. The values that emotions reflect are shaped by personal experience and by environment. Since teachers cannot dictate to students what their experiences and their

Figure 1: Three Dimensions of Behavior

Type of Behavior:	Ideal	Intended	Actual
Data Source:	Literature Review	Interview	Observation
Illustrative Statement:	"As teachers we need to be clear that we cannot dictate to children what their values should be." (Raths, Harmin & Simon, 1975, p. 80)	I: How do you feel that voicing your opinion by saying to students "I would like you to do this" or "I would not like to see you doing this" fits in with your goals? S: It gets them to do the right thing, what I kind of set in my mind for them to do.	S: (To Students) That's looking out for number one. That's not what I'm talking to you about. I don't want to see you doing that.
Result:	Theoretical Base	Goal	Action

environments will be, they also cannot dictate their values. Therefore, by definition and by social right, values have been considered to be personal traits (Raths, Harmin & Simon, 1975).

Rogers (1976) has discovered that it is not unusual to find teachers who profess to be "humanistic", yet attempt to impose their values on their students:

> I have found from experience that to stress the value of being real, of being one's feelings, is taken by some as a license to pass judgments on others, to project on others all the feelings which one should be "owning". Nothing could be further from my meaning. Actually, the achievement of realness is most difficult, and even when one wishes to be truly genuine, it occurs but rarely (p. 275).

CONSISTENT PRACTICES: RELATING CONCEPTS TO REAL LIFE

Although the subject's inconsistencies with the humanistic literature were more pronounced than her consistencies, three of her methods illustrated congruence between theory and practice. The first of these strategies was Charle's careful selection of a content and format that would make her course relevant to students' lives. The topics Charle selected for her survey course were chosen deliberately for their interest to students. The subject attempted to incorporate topics the students could identify with, such as emotions, perceptions, motivations, love and death. She presented these themes in order of each class' perference to capture their interest.

Charle's format consisted of lecturing through a theory/story approach in which she illustrated concepts by relating incidents and examples from real life. She also used role-playing to focus on the application level of her content. Where possible, she used this method to portray ordinary life

experiences, such as enacting the stages of grief associated with the dying process.

The humanistic literature advises educators to teach the student, not the subject. Tenents of humanism prescribe relevant content that can be integrated and used by students in their lives outside the classroom. By doing so, Charle was consistent with the principles of humanism.

CONSISTENT PRACTICES: REVEALING THE TEACHER AS A PERSON

The literature has emphasized the importance of teachers sharing their personal selves with their students. Rogers (1970) noted the effects of this practice:

> When the facilitator is a real person, being what he is, entering into a relationship with the learner without presenting a front or a facade, he is much more likely to be effective (pp. 268-269).

Both Charle's goals and her actions were consistent with the ideals of humanism in this aspect of her role. Her intended behavior was reflected in her verbalized objective:

> S: My goal is to come across to them as a person, just a human being who is in there with them, with the same kind of emotions and problems and conflicts and positive thoughts that they have, only maybe more years of experience.

Charle shared her personal self and her experiences with her classes to accomplish her objective of being seen as a person:

> S: It's a great day today; I'm going to be smiling for a long time! I got a loan today for my roof. This morning I put on that Bob Seger cut "Shinin' Brightly" and turned the stereo up to eight. Things are on an upward trend in my life.

CONSISTENT PRACTICES: SHOWING PERSONAL INTEREST

Charle attempted to counteract the dehumanizing nature of an educational institution by showing a personal interest in her students. It was her usual practice to talk with individuals or engage in informal bantering. Her instruction did not start automatically when the bell rang; Charle considered that practice as too "Skinnerian". Rather, she used the first few minutes as a "warm-up" period, demonstrating her interest in students' activities:

> S: Who here was in on that riot yesterday? Now they're banning radios, blaming it on the issue that sparked the fight, "Which is better, disco or rock"? When the real issue is Whites hate Mexicans. That reminds me of the saying "When you're up to your ass in alligators, it's real hard to remember your objective was to drain the swamp."

SUMMARY

The subject showed some consistencies with the literature, but many of her practices were in direct opposition to humanistic theory. Although she reported reliance on advice from particular humanists, her most notable methods were contrary to their recommendations. Despite this discrepancy, the teacher believed that she did more good than harm. Whether or not this was true remains an empirical question.

CONCLUSIONS

Results of this study have confirmed findings from other efforts. Rogers (1970) and Roebuck (1978) also have found inconsistencies between teachers' reported philosophies and

their actual practices. It appears that "humanistic" teachers are not often distinguishable from other teachers in their methods.

The absence of consistency, clarity and precision in applying humanistic principles to instruction may be due in part to a lack of description at the level of practice. This study provided behavioral contrasts which illustrated appropriate applications and misapplications of humanism. Findings from this investigation may assist in reducing the associated degrees of freedom which have encouraged misinterpretations of humanistic theory.

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